

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 12, 2012

Agenda Item: Marshall Creek WMA Phase III Acquisition - Region 2, Missoula County

Division: Fish & Wildlife, Wildlife Bureau

Action Needed: Endorse Course of Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP seeks an endorsement to initiate an acquisition process for Phase III of the Marshall Creek Wildlife Management Area. In 2011, FWP completed purchase from The Nature Conservancy of Phases I & II of the 24,170-acre Marshall Creek WMA. These former Plum Creek Timber Co. lands, northwest of Seeley Lake, comprised much of the remaining undeveloped and unprotected private land in the upper Clearwater Drainage—including the West Fork Clearwater, Marshall Creek, and most of the Deer Creek main stem. The proposed acquisition is for the three remaining sections (1,920 acres) along the southeastern border of the WMA to permanently protect the remaining privately-held reach of Deer Creek, consolidate public ownership in a key area for fish and wildlife conservation, and secure additional public access to Marshall Creek WMA. FWP would purchase the parcels from Five Valleys Land Trust using about \$3.48 million in funds previously secured from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Habitat Conservation Plan Habitat Acquisition Program. These funds must be used for native fish conservation projects in the upper Clearwater. The USFWS authorized expenditure of the funds to expand the Marshall Creek WMA. FVLT agrees to donate required nonfederal matching funds in the form of a bargain sale to FWP and is currently negotiating a purchase and sale agreement with PCTC. FWP proposes to then purchase the parcels from FVLT. These parcels will easily be incorporated into the WMA management plans and would complement Phase I & II conservation investments. FWP may also apply for additional nonfederal grants to supplement FVLT contributions, if needed. Purchase agreements would contain contingencies requiring that grant-match requirements are met and formal public, FWP Commission, and Land Board approvals are secured.

Public Involvement Process & Results

No public involvement has occurred thus far for Phase III. An environmental assessment and associated public review would take place if the commission endorses this process.

Alternatives and Analysis

The Commission could decide not to endorse proceeding with the acquisition process for Phase III. This would mean a loss of fish and wildlife habitat values and public recreational values and would leave unprotected a key area adjacent to the existing WMA.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale

FWP recommends that the commission endorse proceeding with the acquisition process. The WMA has exceptional fish, wildlife, and public recreational value. It is part of a key terrestrial link connecting the Swan and Mission mountain ranges. It supports important habitat for grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and other sensitive species; and provides year-round elk and deer habitat. It includes the last unprotected reach of Deer Creek and portions of Fawn Creek, which support high densities of cutthroat trout and a remnant population of bull trout. FWP recognizes the Deer Creek drainage as a unique opportunity for watershed level restoration work to benefit and restore native fish.

Proposed Motion

I move that the commission endorse FWP's request to initiate the land acquisition process for Phase III of the Marshall Creek WMA.